CHAPTER VIII.

PALM-LEAF AND OTHER MSS.

Palm leaf and other MSS.

UNTIL recently Hindu manuscripts were on two kinds of writing material, the *ōle* and the *kadata*. The former was mostly used for literary works, and the latter for accounts and historical records. The *ōle* is the leaf of the *tāla* or palmyra (*Borassus flabelliformis*). The material, as used for manuscripts, is stiff and flexible but brittle, of a yellowish-brown colour, from 1 foot to 2 feet long, and from 1 inch to 1½ inches wide. It is written on length-wise, with an iron style, the character being afterwards brought out by rubbing in black colouring matter. The bundle of leaves forming a work are all of the same size, and strung on thin cord which passes through holes punched in the middle towards either extremity. A piece of wood, the size of the leaf, is placed at top and bottom, and tied down with the string, forming a binding for protection. The writing is often very minute and close together, with no break but a perpendicular stroke between one part and another. Such being the materials, the wonder is that so many works of antiquity have survived to this day.

The Kadata.

The *kadata* is composed of cloth covered with a composition of charcoal and gum. It presents a black surface, which is written on like a slate, with a piece of *balapam* or pot stone. The book is of one piece, folded in and out, and is from 8 inches to 1 foot wide, and 12 to 18 feet long. A piece of wood, the size of the book, is attached at either end like a binding, and the whole is put into a case of silk or cotton, or simply tied up with a bit of string. The writing can be rubbed out and

renewed at will. The *kadata* is still used by merchants and shop-keepers for keeping accounts. Though liable to be expunged, it is perhaps a more durable record and material than the best writing on the best paper.

Introduction of paper.

The introduction of paper is due to the Muhammadans, and certain coarse kinds were till lately made in the country, resembling the whitey-brown unglazed paper used in England for packets.

Collection of MSS.

The duty of collecting MSS. on behalf of the State has been entrusted to the Director of Archæological Researches, within the past thirty years. Many valuable MSS. in Prākrit, Sānskrit, Kannada, Telugu and other languages have been discovered and lodged in the Government Oriental MSS. Library at Mysore. Some of these have been edited as well and issued to the public at nominal prices. Kautilya's *Artha Sāstra*, a treatise on politics ascribed to the 4th century B.C. but whose date is not yet quite settled, which has been translated by Dr. R. Shama Sastry, the present Director, is one among several works published under the auspices of Government under the general name of *Bibliotheca Sanskrita*. The Department was the first also to make known to the world the discovery of the works of Bhāsa, the great dramatist, who is referred to by Kālidāsa with respect. A section in the annual Report of the Archæological Department has been devoted for many years now, to a brief statement of the work done during each year in connection with the search for and collection of MSS.